

# 3-D FILM ARCHIVE

 Search this site

[Home](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Archive History](#)
[3-D Myths](#)
[Lost 3-D](#)
[3-D Holy Grail](#)
[What Killed 3-D?](#)
[3-D Comic Books](#)

[Widescreen Documentation](#)
[First Year of Widescreen Production](#)
[First Year of Stereophonic Motion Pictures](#)
[Hondo](#)

[Dial M for Murder](#)
[Creature from the Black Lagoon](#)
[House of Wax](#)
[Kiss Me Kate](#)
[Dragonfly Squadron](#)
[The Bubble](#)

[3-D Rarities](#)
[The Mask](#)
[Gog](#)
[First 3-D Feature - 1922](#)
[3-D Features and Shorts 1952-1962](#)

[3-D Features and Shorts 1966 - 1997](#)
[September Storm and Harmony Lane](#)
[It Came from Outer Space](#)

[Those Redheads from Seattle](#)
[Cease Fire](#)
[The Maze](#)
[Sangaree](#)
[Binaural or Bust](#)
[First Year of Stereo Records](#)

## Lost 3-D

by Bob Furmanek

by

After it was a smash hit on Broadway, TOP BANANA went on tour for a year playing in major cities across the country. Phil Silvers and the cast finished their successful run at the Biltmore Theater in downtown Los Angeles on June 27, 1953. During that engagement, Harry Popkin (D.O.A., AND THEN THERE WERE NONE) negotiated with producers Albert Zugsmith (TOUCH OF EVIL, THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN) and Ben Peskay to film TOP BANANA exactly as it had been presented on stage in sold out performances across the country. They packed up the sets and costumes and moved the entire company over to the Motion Picture Center Studios in Hollywood. That's where the film was photographed and not on the Winter Garden stage which has been claimed for many years.

On July 21, 1953, filming began in widescreen, color and 3-D. The concept was to give the audience a choice seat at a top Broadway show. The producers envisioned this format as a new way to inexpensively film stage shows and present them in theaters across the country. They developed a rather complicated tracking shot for the opening of the film. The camera would represent the viewer and approach the box office and buy tickets, enter the lobby and proceed to a fifth row, aisle seat. Lights would dim, the overture would play and the show would begin. (This elaborate opening was abandoned in favor of a static shot of the theater marquee, which then dissolves directly into the stage show.) It was photographed with Natural Vision cameras, the same rigs that had filmed BWANA DEVIL, HOUSE OF WAX, FORT TI, CHARGE AT FEATHER RIVER, DEVIL'S CANYON, THE MOONLIGHTER, SOUTHWEST PASSAGE and GOG.

"Top Banana" (Phil Silvers, Rose Marie), claimed a new shooting record, early this month, when the entire film was completed in five days. Albert Zugsmith and Ben Peskay produced the film, just as it was presented on the Broadway stage. It is in 3D, wide screen and color.

The film was in post-production in September 1953 just as THE ROBE and CinemaScope premiered and 3-D was starting to decline at the box office. While shopping the property around for a distributor (the film was independently financed) the producers announced on October 27 they would release TOP BANANA flat only, citing the public's lukewarm response to the current 3-D releases. In early December, they signed a distribution deal with United Artists. Later that month, the success of some new 3-D releases (KISS ME KATE, HONDO, CEASE FIRE and MISS SADIE THOMPSON) prompted UA to announce on December 10 that a 3-D version would be available for exhibitors. Unfortunately, that is the last reference to any release of the stereoscopic version of this film. When it was sneak previewed, shown to the trades and released in February 1954, it was shown flat only.



The film was photographed on Eastmancolor negative film 5248 (25 ASA tungsten) and processed by the Color Corporation of America laboratory (formerly SuperCinecolor/Cinecolor) in Burbank. Release prints were made by Pathe Labs. Color Corporation went out of business the following year. Apparently, all of the original elements were junked at that time. The 35mm left/right negatives were probably stored under Roadshow Productions.

Sadly, the only material in the United Artists archive today is an edited 35mm release print of the right side. That is the version which has been released on home video and it's missing about 15 minutes of footage. There are no negatives, color separations,

interpositives, dupe negatives, nothing. However, the missing 15 minutes does survive in both an uncut 16mm Kodachrome print struck in 1954 and an original, faded 35mm release print now at the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

*Handwritten: Broadway Reporter*

**FILMED ON STAGE 7/25/53**

**'Top Banana' In 3-D, Color**

By JOE HYAMS

"Top Banana," first of the Broadway musicals to be filmed in three dimensions and color directly from the stage using the Broadway cast, ended its fourth day before the cameras at Motion Picture Center yesterday and the producers were receiving both condolences and congratulations.

For one thing the announced budget of \$300,000 has been doubled because of "unexpected expenses." On the other hand, filming has proceeded at record speed and it is hoped the musicals will be completed by Tuesday and ready for theater release in October.

Although the musical is being filmed directly from the stage the actual shooting is being done on a huge motion picture set where a complete stage has been set up. All of the customary stage props from footlights to proscenium arch and curtains are used. Original sets and costumes, freshened up and painted a little brighter for the color cameras, are also being used.

Two three dimension cameras with crews of three men and three color consultants plus a battery of nine electricians operating 48 5,000 watt and greater electric lamps are needed for lighting—one reason for the revised budget. On the first day of shooting more than 400 people were on the set including the cast, crew and special technicians.

The technique used for filming is simple since all of the cast except Rose Marie have had two years of rehearsals in their roles. Only one rehearsal is used before each scene to give the technicians an idea of the action.

Average length of "takes" so far has been nine minutes. This compares with an average "take" of two minutes for the ordinary picture. More than 106 minutes of film were exposed in three days compared with a previous high of 36 minutes of film exposed during normal shooting.

Scenes are filmed in continuity as they would appear on stage with one camera focusing on closeups, another on long shots. The musical was shortened to two hours and a few deletions made because of censorship requirements.

The Broadway cast which is under Screen Actor's Guild instead of Actor's Equity now receives an SAG minimum of \$250 a week instead of \$125. Phil Silvers, star of the musical, has a profit participation deal in the picture with co-producers Ben Peskay and Albert Zugsmith. Harry Zeven is associate producer and Alfred E. Green is directing.

How does the cast like re-creating their Broadway roles before movie cameras?

Phil Silvers said it was driving him crazy. "No laughs. No audience. No realism. Luckily I remember when the audience should laugh and I time myself."

Rose Marie who is back with the musical after a year's absence said she found herself over-playing too much. "You have to underplay for the film because you don't have to worry about the guy in the balcony. The film audience is the man in the front row center."

David Gard and Ben Roberts who have featured roles said they thought the movie should be a "snap" but the "bit about getting to work at seven in the morning and staying until seven at night is wearing us down."

**Tues., Oct. 27, 1953**

**Costs Al Zugsmith \$30,000 To Peel 3-D Off 'Banana'**

"Top Banana," screen version of the stage musical which Ben Peskay and Albert Zugsmith indie produced in 3-D, will go out in regular 2-D form, Zugsmith reported yesterday. Film is being prepped for release as a standard, and the approximately \$30,000 extra for its tri-dee filming will be chalked up as a loss.

Decision to release film in 2-D is due to fall-off of the 3-D market, according to producer. Peskay arrived in NY yesterday to talk a releasing deal.

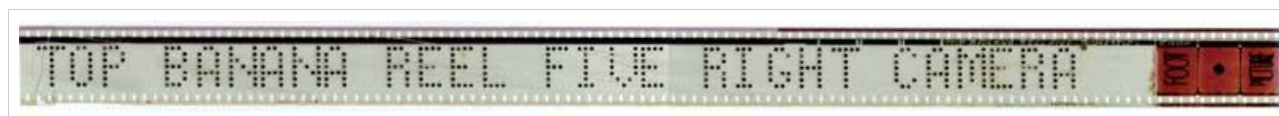
Zugsmith also has cancelled plans to produce his upcoming American Pictures feature, "Great Green Og," in the depth medium, as had been originally projected, for the same reason.

### Releasing 'Banana' In Four Versions

New York.—Roadshow Productions' "Top Banana," starring Phil Silvers, Rose Marie, Danny Scholl and Judy Lynn, will be distributed by United Artists in four different versions—2-D, 3-D, wide-screen and normal screen.

The picture, directed by Alfred E. Green and co-produced by Ben Peskay and Albert Zugsmith, is scheduled for March opening in key cities.

The 3-D footage is not completely lost. In June 2003, I made a very interesting discovery. While examining an original 35mm trailer, I found that certain shots in the trailer were from the opposite eye of the surviving 35mm print. While the negatives may be gone, at least a few moments now survive in 3-D!







### The following pre-1960 3-D films are lost:

- A Cocktail at Sloppy Joe's - 1953 (one side exists) - anaglyph
- A Runaway Taxi - 1925 anaglyph
- Acrobatiks - 1953 - never released (William Cameron Menzies)
- American Beauties - 1953 anaglyph
- American Life - 1953 - Bolex 16mm
- Bandit Island - 1953 (one side exists) anaglyph - Lon Chaney
- Bowery Scandals - 1953 anaglyph
- Carmenesque - 1953 (partial of one side exists) - Lili St. Cyr
- Caribbean Nights - 1953 (never released)
- Chicago Cubs vs. Milwaukee Braves - 1953 - Bolex 16mm
- Cleopatra Follies - 1953 anaglyph
- College Capers - 1953 (have anaglyph, need left/right 35mm)
- Edwin S. Porter tests - 3 reels - 1915 - anaglyph more info here: [Home](#)
- Elementals, the - 1953 - Ray Harryhausen animation tests
- First in Fashion for '54 - General Motors
- Foodini in Four Dimensions - 1953 (one side exists)
- Fun in the Sun - 1953 - never released (William Cameron Menzies)

Holsum Bread commercials – 1953 – Bolex 16mm

I Was a Burlesque Queen - 1953 (3-D segment is lost) anaglyph

In Tune with Tomorrow - 1939 (we have one side)

Indian Summer - 1953 – Bolex 16mm

Luna-cy – 1924 anaglyph

M.A.R.S aka Radio Mania 1923 (one side exists)

Movies of the Future - 1923 (segments survive) anaglyph

Ouch! – 1925 anaglyph

Packaging – the Third Dimension 1953 – Bolex 16mm

Parisienne Life aka Paris Life – 1953 anaglyph

Persian Slave Market – 1953 anaglyph

Plastigrams – 1924 anaglyph

Polaroid on Parade - 1936

Polly Wolly Doodle – 1953 (never released)

Power of Love, the - 1922 – anaglyph [First 3-D Feature](#)

Sangaree - 1953 - 3-D trailer with Adolph Zukor for Paramount tradeshow

Sears training film – 1953 – Bolex 16mm

Selected Views of Yosemite Valley - 1922 (one side exists) anaglyph [3-D Holy Grail](#)

Southwest Passage - 1954 (4 of 9 reels are lost)

Stereoscopiks – 1924 anaglyph

Sunday in Stereo – 1953 – Bolex 16mm

This is Progress – 1954 – General Motors 16mm

Top Banana – 1954 (left side is lost)

Zowie – 1925 anaglyph

More information on the 1953/1954 titles can be found in:

[Golden Age 3-D Features & Shorts](#)

[If you have ever come across prints of these films, please let us know!](#)



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